WHAT IS CLAIMED IS

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1. A semiconductor integrated circuit, comprising:

a differential calculating unit which obtains a differential between a value of a pixel of

10   interest and values of surrounding pixels contained in an image signal supplied from an image sensor;

a dead-zone generating unit which defines a predetermined range of pixel values; and

a comparison unit which checks whether the

15   differential falls outside the predetermined range,

wherein contour enhancement is applied to the pixel of interest in response to a determination by the comparison unit that the differential falls outside the predetermined range.

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2. The semiconductor integrated circuit as

25   claimed in claim 1, further comprising a enhancement value generating unit which obtains an enhancement value based on differentials between the value of the pixel of interest and the values of the surrounding pixels, said enhancement value

30   generating unit adding the enhancement value to the value of the pixel of interest in response to the determination by the comparison unit that the differential falls outside the predetermined range.

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3. The semiconductor integrated circuit as claimed in claim 1, wherein said differential calculating unit obtains the differential by using only a green-color component among a plurality of

5 color components of the image signal.

10 4. The semiconductor integrated circuit as claimed in claim 1, wherein said differential calculating unit obtains the differential by using only a green-color component among a plurality of color components of the image signal, and said

15 enhancement value generating unit obtains the enhancement value by using only the green-color component.

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5. The semiconductor integrated circuit as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a luminance signal generating unit which obtains a luminance

25 component from a plurality of color components of the image signal, and said differential calculating unit obtains the differential by using only the luminance component.

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6. The semiconductor integrated circuit as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a luminance

35 signal generating unit which obtains a luminance component from a plurality of color components of the image signal, wherein said differential

calculating unit obtains the differential by using only the luminance component, and said enhancement value generating unit obtains the enhancement value by using only the luminance component.

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7. The semiconductor integrated circuit as
10 claimed in claim 1, wherein said differential calculating unit obtains a difference between the value of the pixel of interest and an average of the values of the surrounding pixels as said differential.

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8. The semiconductor integrated circuit as
20 claimed in claim 1, wherein said differential calculating unit obtains a difference between the value of the pixel of interest and a value of an adjacent pixel with respect to each of four neighboring pixels as said differential, and the
25 comparison unit checks whether the differential falls within the predetermined range with respect to each of the four neighboring pixels.

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9. The semiconductor integrated circuit as claimed in claim 8, wherein said enhancement value generating unit selects a differential having a
35 largest absolute value among each said differential corresponding to the four neighboring pixels, and performs said contour enhancement in response to

size of the differential having the largest absolute
value.

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10. The semiconductor integrated circuit
as claimed in claim 9, wherein said contour
enhancement is not performed if an absolute value of
10   a largest one of each said differential
corresponding to the four neighboring pixels is
identical to an absolute value of a smallest one of
each said differential corresponding to the four
neighboring pixels.
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11. A method of enhancing contours,
20   comprising the steps of:
obtaining a differential between a value
of a pixel of interest and values of surrounding
pixels contained in an image signal supplied from an
image sensor;
25   defining a predetermined range of pixel
values;
checking whether the differential falls
outside the predetermined range; and
applying contour enhancement to the pixel
30   of interest in response to a determination that the
differential falls outside the predetermined range.